

The Italian demographic winter

Gian Carlo Blangiardo

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An already fragile demographic picture

Well before the Covid-19 era, between 31 Dec 2013 and 31 Dec 2019, the Italian population recorded a loss of 705,000 residents. In 2019 alone, Italy's population natural balance, 420,000 births and 634,000 deaths, was negative for 214,000 units.

During the last decades, after II world war the total resident in the country shows four main trends:

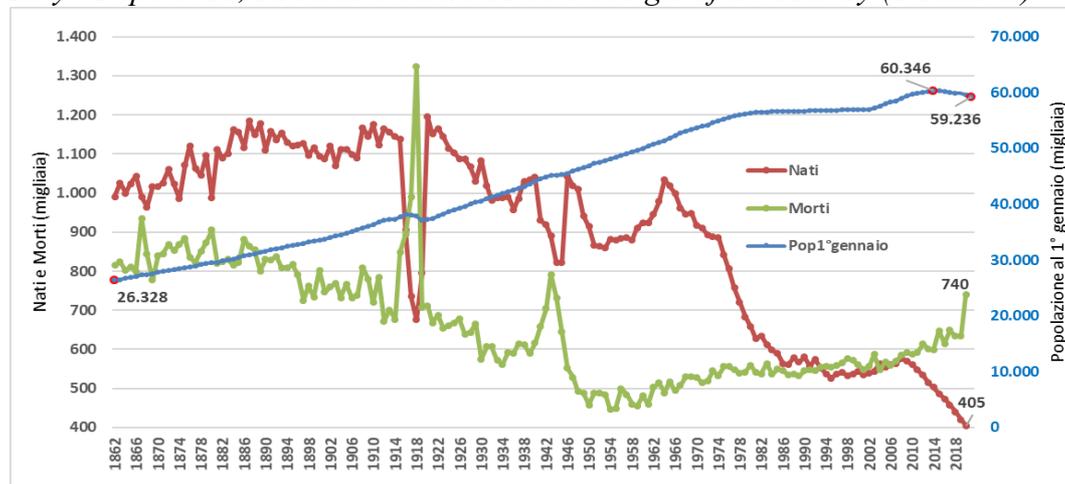
- Growth 1946-'70 (30 years);
- Stagnation '80-'90 (20 years);
- Modest revival: early 2000s (10 years);
- Setback: since 2014 (7 years).

In the last 12 years, births have decreased without interruption. From 2008 onwards, the gap between deaths and births progressively widened year after year. Since 2013, every year the record for the lowest number of births in Italian history (since 1861) has been broken downwards.

If we widen the scope of our analysis to include the migratory balance, net migration, which at first acted as a growth factor and then as a compensating factor, from 2014 onward was no longer able to offset the ever-increasing deficit resulting from the increasing excess of deaths over births (natural balance). Therefore, over the 2002-2019 period, the total loss of residents, in terms of natural balance, was 1,320,000: a steady, steep descent in the 20 years preceding

the outbreak of Covid-19, until the 2020 slump, when the demographic balance marks a loss of 404,000 residents, with 405,000 births, 740,000 deaths, and a natural balance of -335,000.

Italy - Population, births and deaths since the origin of the country (thousands)



The Covid-19 toll

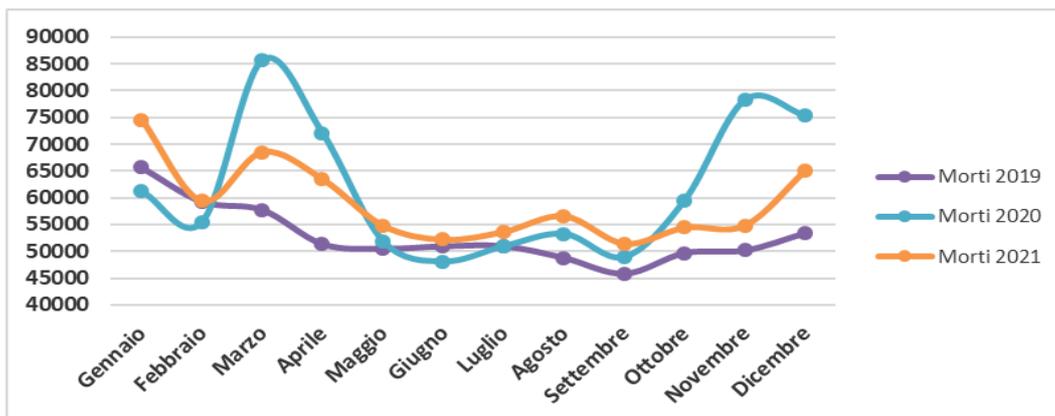
In 2020, as compared with the 5-year-average of 2015-2019, Italy recorded +247 deaths per day and -143 births per day. In 2021 the deaths surplus was slightly lower (+216 per day compared with 2015-2019) while the births deficit was slightly higher (-159). In 22 months – from March 2020 to December 2021 – the Italian population lost 606,000 residents.

What factors played a role (and how) in determining Italy's demographic dynamics in 2020-2021?

In my view, the three major causes are:

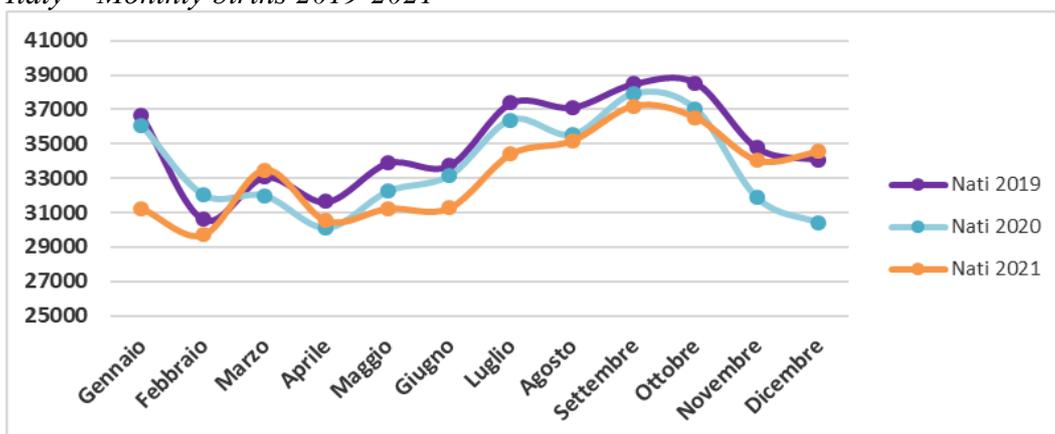
- Italy's loss of attractiveness for potential immigration (in line with the trend before the pandemic);
- A mortality peak of wartime proportions: Covid-19 produced more additional deaths than the II world war from its beginning (June 1940) to the final armistice (September 1943);
- The "Covid-19 effect" in postponement of conceptions, which (will be) added to the downward trend in births.

Italy – Monthly deaths 2019-2021



The economic hardship also contributed to this condition. In the period December 2020-January 2021, 76.5% of the respondents to the Istat survey, “Behaviour and opinions of citizens during the second pandemic wave” expected that the economic situation of their household was not to change in the short-term (3 months). 12.9% of them thought it would get worse, and only 6.1% that it would get better. The most pessimistic responses were those of men aged 25-34 (20.5%).

Italy – Monthly births 2019-2021



Suggestions and lines of action to reverse (out of the pandemic) the demographic winter

In light of the dynamics and perspectives outlined so far - all of which were already present in the pre-pandemic era - action in response to the 'demographic winter' is essential in three areas.

1. The flows of 'production' or acquisition of new human capital: births, immigration/ non-emigration;
2. Education and integration of the new human capital in the social and economic life cycle: school and family life cycle (young people);

3. Preservation and enhancement of those (existing) human resources that are repositories of experience and knowledge, who are still fully, even if "differently", valid: support/incentive to active ageing programmes (active ageing).

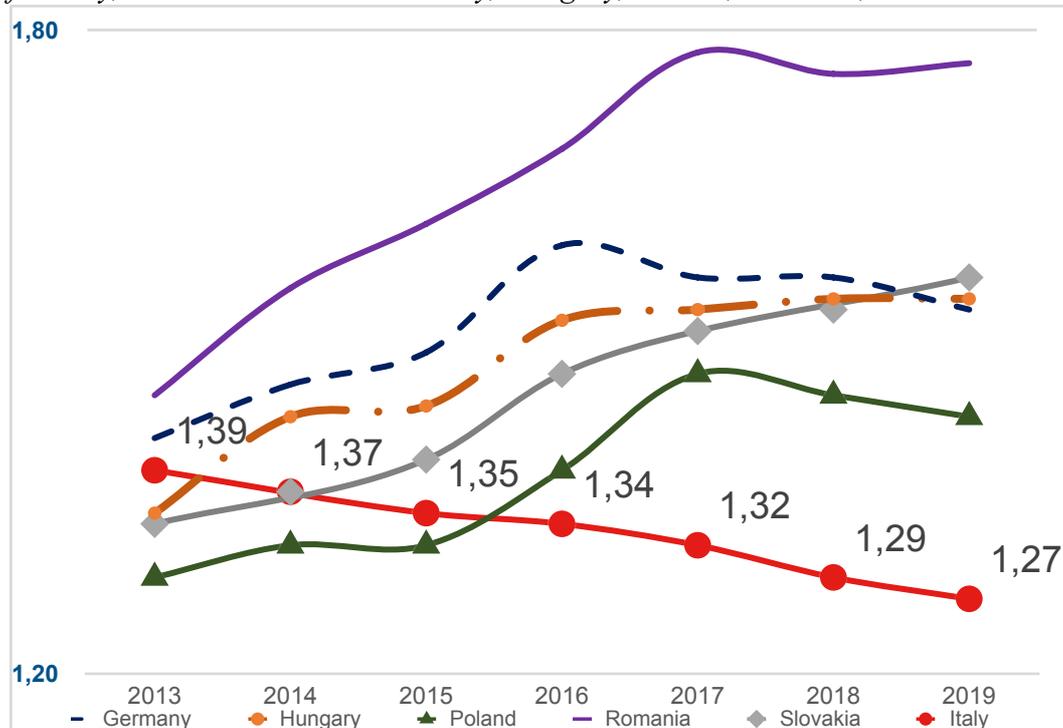
As regard the recovering of births

There is a fundamental question: can Italian families be helped to make up the ground lost in terms of fertility? Recent international statistics can support an answer.

If we compare 2013-2019 total fertility rates (TFR) before pandemic era, we can highlight the following changes in some UE Countries:

Germany	+0,12
Hungary	+0,20
Poland	+0,15
Romania	+0,31
Slovakia	+0,23
ITALY	-0,12

The TFR - average number of children per woman - in the same period, declined for Italy, while increased in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.



A similar outcome in some European low fertility countries can point out that it is possible to reverse the trend. In that sense a valid purpose for Italy could be, with appropriate policy and cultural actions, to increase the average number of children per woman by 0.6 by the end of the decade, despite the obstacles, is nonetheless a (realistic) target to 2030.

This entails:

1. Recovering by 2022 - mid-2023 the drop in marriages recorded during 2020 and 2021;
2. Acting on intensity and timing to compensate for the reduction effect (-11%) resulting from changes in the age structure of the population of childbearing age.

We guess that a similar outcome would lead within a decade to an annual increase of 130,000 more births (+33%), i.e about 517,000 additional births over the decade as a whole (Istat projections, median hypothesis).

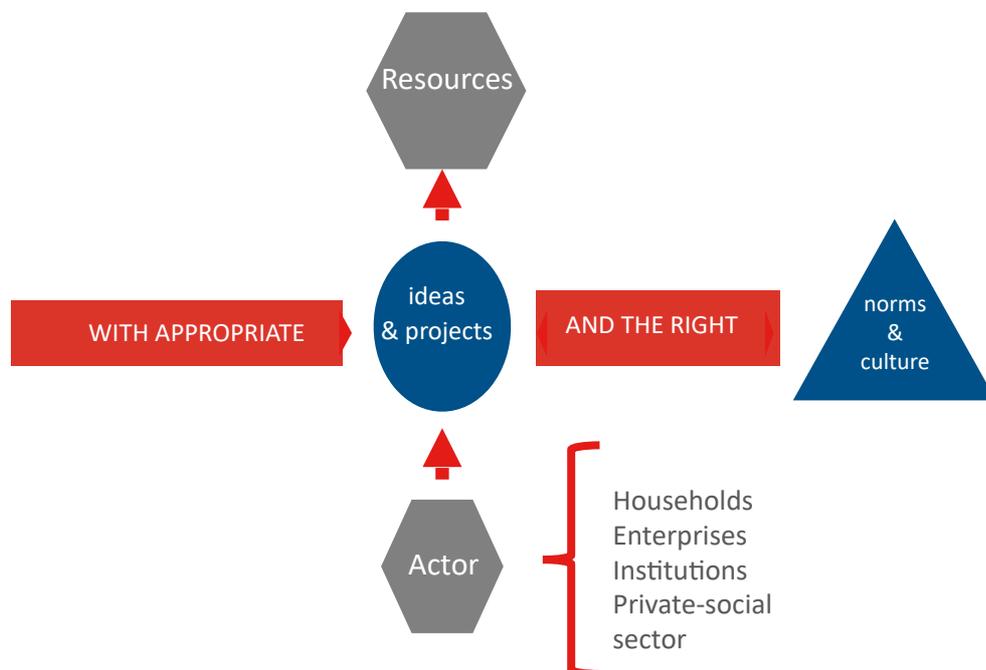
With a life expectancy of 82 years for a male and 86 years for a female, an addition of half a million births implies that the population to which they belong will acquire 42 million life-years to spend on time.

For Italy, this is equivalent to increasing the demographic patrimony - i.e. the number of years of the future that the total number of residents is entitled to - by about 2%.

How to get there?

A change in the overall picture is possible with the appropriate triangulation. It implies acting on resources, to devise and implement ideas and projects, involving all the relevant actors (households, enterprise, the Third sector, and, obviously, the Institutions), while working ceaseless on norms, and culture as well.

We are confident that it can be done. And we trust that it will be really done!



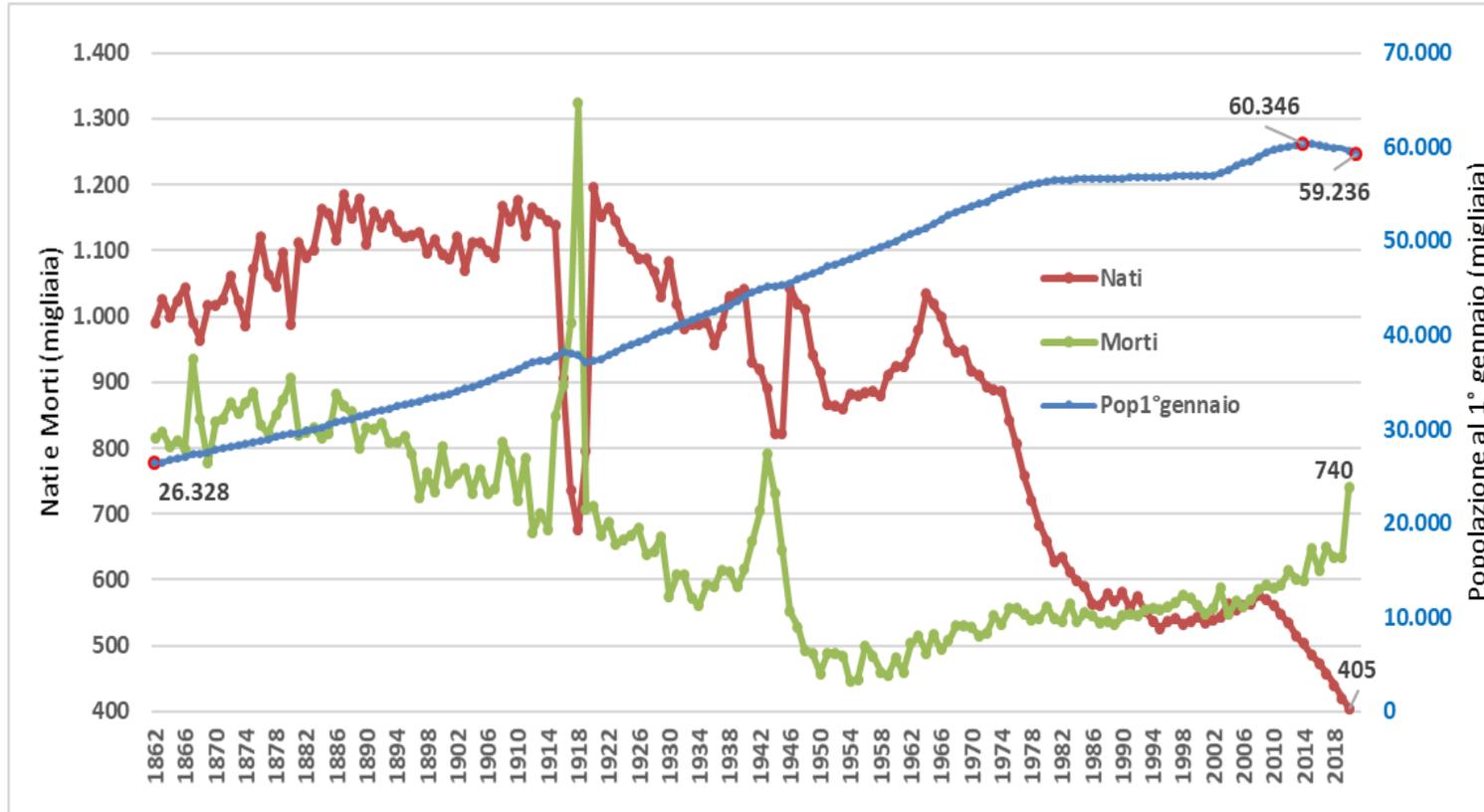
3rd European Catholic Social Days - Bratislava 17th March – 20th March 2022
COMCE – Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU

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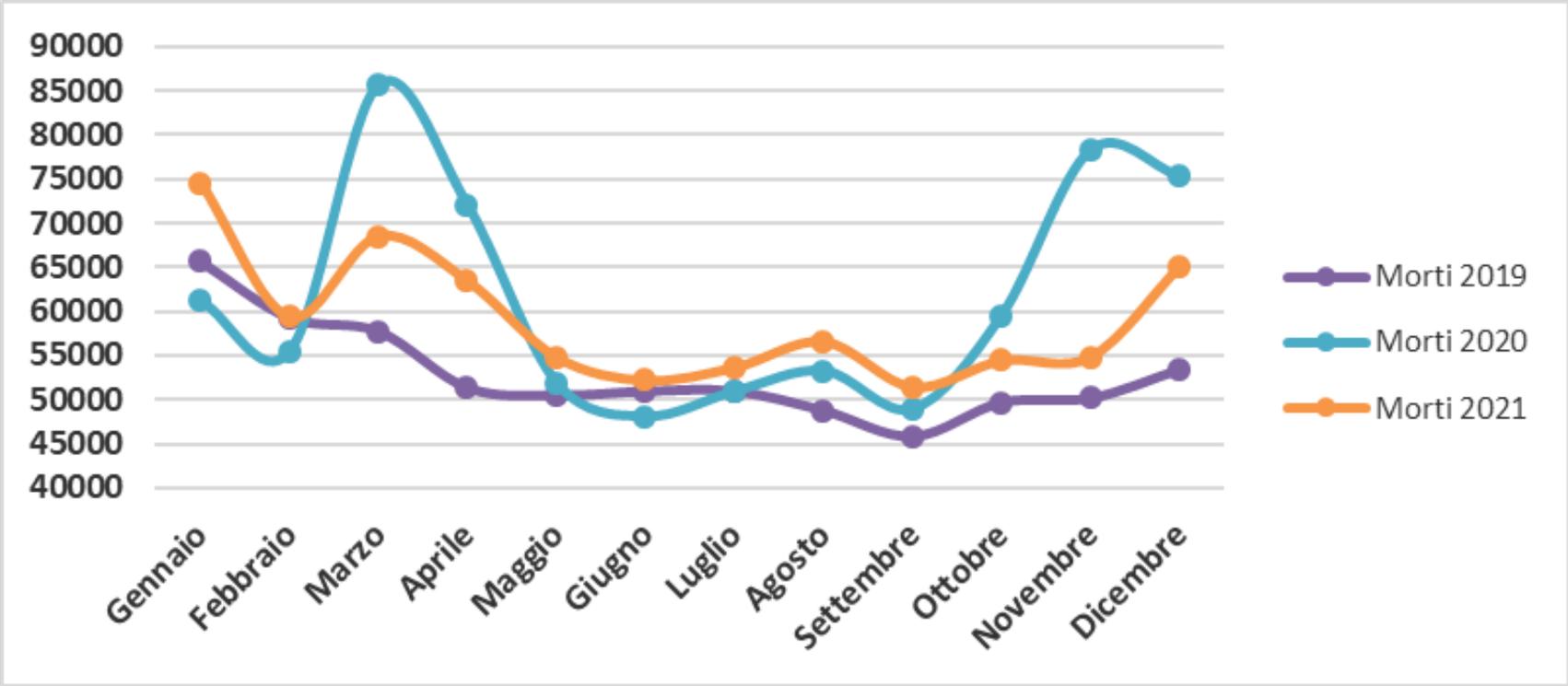
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Italy - Population, births and deaths since the origin of the country (thousands)

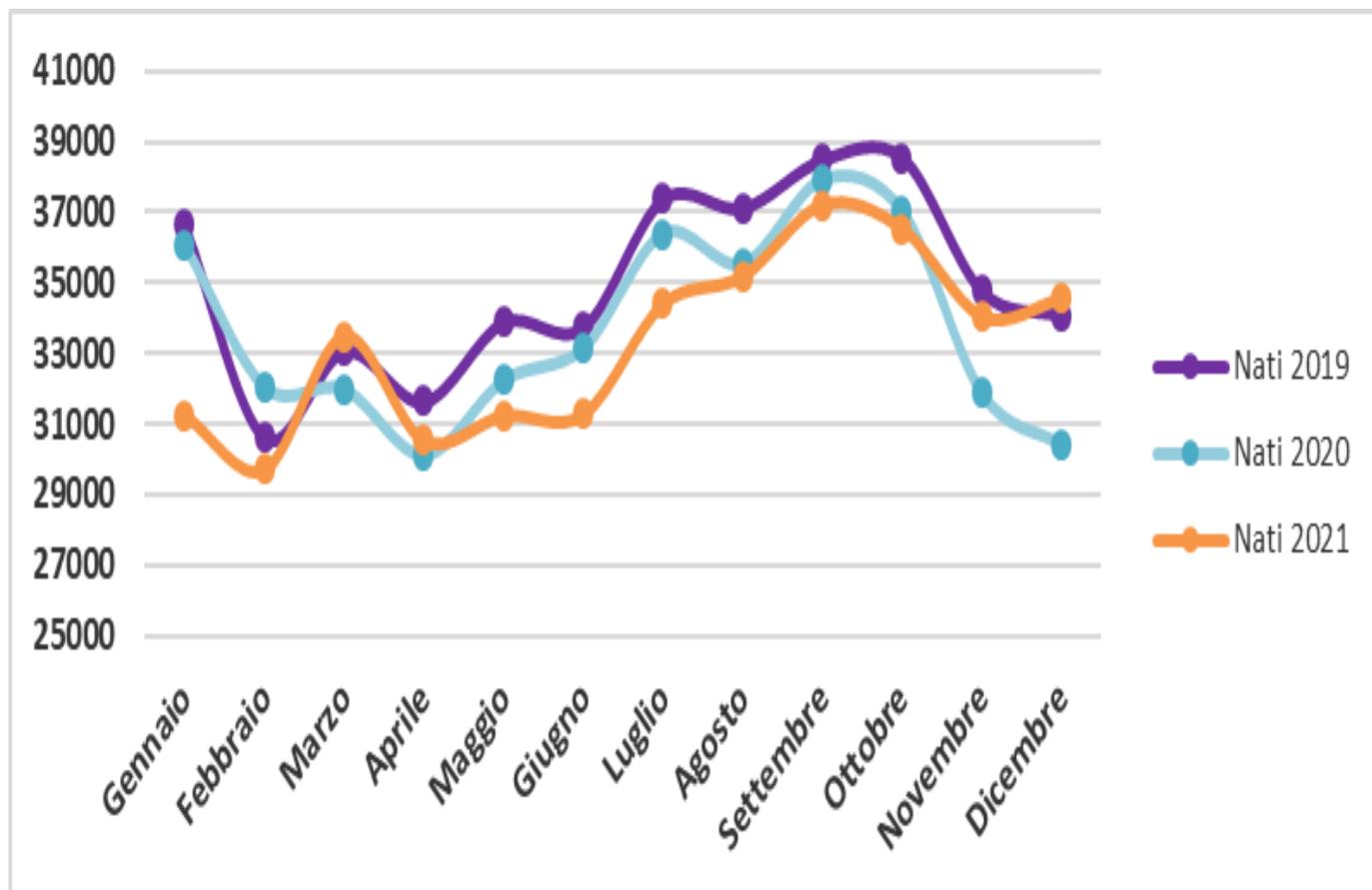


From 60,3 milion residents (31.12.2013) to 58.8 million resident (31.12.2021)
Demograpiuc balance 2021
399,000 births
709,000 deaths

Italy – Monthly deaths before and in the pandemic years (2019-2021)



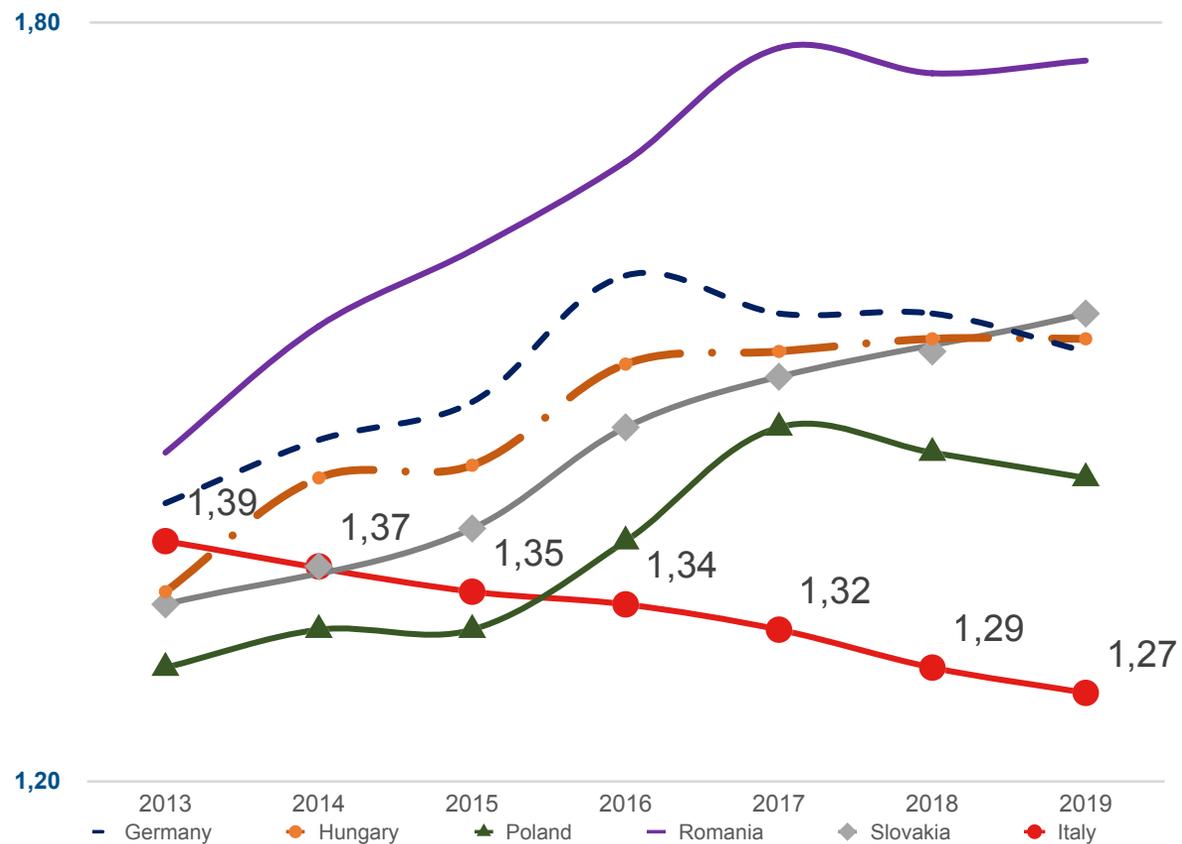
Italy – Monthly births before and in the pandemic years (2019-2021)



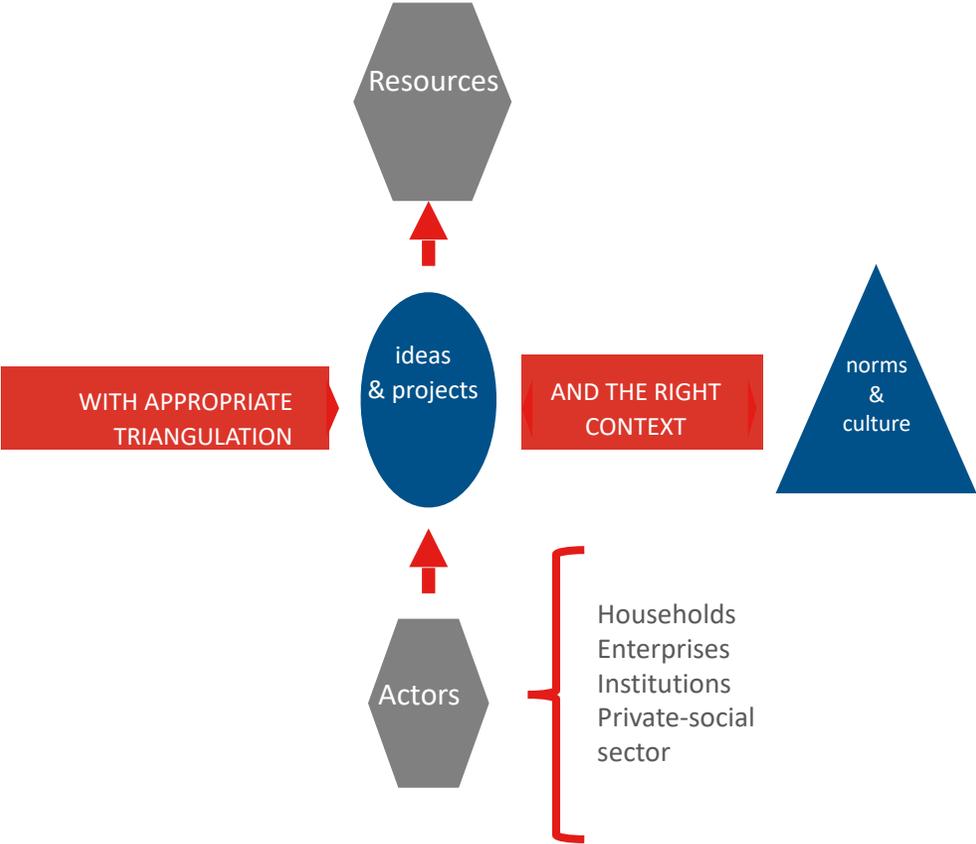
Births change

nov-20	-8,34
dic-20	-10,72
gen-21	-13,37
feb-21	-7,34
mar-21	+4,66
apr-21	1,27
mag-21	-3,17
giu-21	-5,72
lug-21	-5,46
ago-21	-1,00
set-21	-1,86
ott-21	-1,29
nov-21	+6,82 (-2,1) *
dic-21	+13,54 (+1,4) *

The TFR - average number of children per woman - in the same period, declined for Italy, while increased in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.



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GRAZIE PER L'ATTENZIONE
Thanks for your attention